

An Opportunity to Reduce Hunger Among Seniors

Support HB 1019 (Meza)

The Problem:

Houston Food Bank has been distributing approximately 800,000 pounds of food per day over the 18 counties we serve.¹ From March to September of this year alone, over 3.8 million households received food through our partner network and our Partner Distribution Organizations. Despite these increased efforts, food insecurity persists.

Seniors are one population we serve that is particularly vulnerable. In 2018, Texas was one of ten states with the highest food insecurity among seniors.² And that was in a relatively good economy, while food insecurity in Texas has doubled over the course of the pandemic.³

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) could help ensure consistent nutrition for low-income seniors as it provides a greater return on investment than any other hunger fighting initiative.⁴ For every one meal a food bank can provide, SNAP can provide nine and for every \$1.00 spent on SNAP, there is a \$1.70 generated in economic activity.⁵ However, due to an arduous application process and lack of knowledge about the program only half of eligible seniors are enrolled.

The Texas Legislature Can Address this by:

- Implementing a simplified application for seniors and persons with a disability
- Extending the eligibility period from 12 to 36 months for seniors and/or persons with a disability who have no earned income (meaning their income eligibility doesn't change).
- Utilizing data matching with Medicaid to identify seniors that are eligible but not enrolled so community partners can better identify and assist them in applying for SNAP.

Please vote in favor of HB 1019 by Representative Meza and take a critical step towards reducing food insecurity and hunger among Texas seniors.

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¹The Houston Food Bank, in collaboration with community Partners, serves an 18-county region of Texas including: Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Ft. Bend, Harris, Liberty, San Jacinto, Trinity, Walker, and Waller. Through Brazos Valley Food Bank we serve the counties of Brazos, Burleson, Grimes, Madison, Montgomery, and Washington. Through Galveston County Food Bank we serve Galveston and through Montgomery County Food Bank we serve Montgomery County.

² Ziliak, J. and Gundersen, C. 2020. *The State of Senior Hunger in 2018*. Feeding America. Available at:

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/2020-The%20State%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%20in%202018.pdf>.

³ Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project. *Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity: A Resource for Improving Measurable Impact*. January 4, 2021. Available at: https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/dell/legislative-initiatives/COVID-19%20and%20FI_1.4.21.pdf.

⁴ Bolen, E. and Wolkomir, E. May 28, 2020. SNAP Boosts Retailers and Local Economies. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.; Food Research and Action Center. December 2017. The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being.

⁵ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2019. *Policy Basics: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*. Available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.